



THE TORCH BEARER

Dakota Rakestraw

speculative fiction forward to "Doing the Hard Thing: Writing Myself into the World"
by Greg Mohan

It was my turn to get the Fire. In turn, each of my brothers had flown to the Mountain to bring back a flame to warm our home. I remember their wings damp with cloud dew. Mine would be damp too.

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The sun stopped shining, unable to break through the clouds. They became dense and impenetrable. The Mountain and the Fire were hidden. We could not reach them.

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Ava's hut was next to ours. Her fire had died. Her empty hearth made our own seem colder, lonelier. She went missing soon after it died.

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At festivals, the elders would tell stories of how our people became Falks. The myths said our ancestors had lived a stagnant, grounded life, creatures of stone until they discovered fire. The ground shook beneath them and the Mountain and its Fire rose from a gap in the earth. They were lifted with the Mountain as it rose and, in the Fire's presence, they grew wings. But now the fires were dwindling. I heard an Elder whisper to another, "We cannot let the fires die. We cannot return to stone."

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Sun was shining again through the verdant canopy above our huts. The clouds had moved on. At night, we could see the Fire burning at the top of the Mountain again.

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I brought a torch down, gripped firmly in my talons, and lit our hearth. I lit Ava's too. It made it seem like someone was home.

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Ava was back. She didn't speak at first. She just made rock figurines. They had beaks just like us, but made out of nut shells.

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"I saw Corinth," she whispered, her first words in over a week since she had come back. "Except he wasn't..." her voice trailed. "He was stone. We were stone." His fire, too, had died during the clouds.